
In a recent vote against increasing education spending in the City of Norwich, Councilwoman Joanne Philbrick, recently referred to teachers as dawn to dusk, tax subsidized day care providers. While people may have varying opinions on school funding, something for which the city of Norwich does not have a stellar reputation, it is astonishing to see one of our locally-elected leaders publicly insult the entire profession charged with educating the children of families who have chosen to call Norwich their home.

Philbrick later lamented on Facebook the days of walking to school with a lunch packed by your mom and playing with friends in the backyard after school. Her comments demonstrate a profound lack of understanding, not only of the responsibilities taken on by today's educators, but also of the many challenges faced by students and their families in our community who perhaps do not have the benefit of such an idyllic upbringing for any number of reasons.

Norwich teachers take pride in their responsibility of educating ALL children in our community regardless of who, or where they are from. Many of our children come from different countries, speaking thirty-five languages. Some do not speak English at all. Others must overcome different obstacles. But regardless of their individual challenges, all of these children are rightfully entitled to a quality public education and it is we, the professional educators and other school staff in this community, who take these fresh minds with their individual strengths and transform them into responsible citizens and leaders. This does not happen by chance.

Teachers must now prepare interactive hands-on lessons which engage young minds in inquiry based lessons. The days of teachers handing out worksheets and reading out of primers is long gone. Teachers must balance the needs of a student population that is increasingly diverse in its learning style, language and socio-economic background. Teachers and students face a very real threat with active shooters and it is no more evident than in the frequent lockdown drills and safety plans school staff must provide. I could list a mountain of other initiatives and state mandated programs required of the school system but our Board of Education and Superintendent have already been trying to explain this to a segment of the city council and mayor to no avail.

Councilwoman Philbrick's comments ironically come during Teacher Appreciation Week, a time when members of the community thank our profession for the contributions we have made to their own successes. The Norwich Teachers' League, who represent the professional educators in grades pre-k through 8th are grateful for the many thanks that have been expressed to us by our students and their families over the years. It is through that parent-teacher-student partnership that future successes will continue. It is unfortunate that that appreciation is not held by all of our elected leaders.

I would like to take a few lines to do what should have been done during the city council meeting. Thank you to the teachers of Norwich Public Schools and NFA for tirelessly working to ensure that our students have the best possible education with what they are given. Thank you to the teachers of Preston and Colchester Public schools for educating my own three children. And lastly, thank you to the students and their parents for entrusting educators in Norwich with this critically important mission to help shape the future of our town, state and nation.

William Priest
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